

Getting to know you

New Zealand Theatre Archives

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Who are you and where are you based?

Theatre Archives New Zealand is a charitable trust based in Wellington. We have links to both Victoria University of Wellington – Te Herenga Waka and Playmarket, and usually meet in Wellington. Our Board of Trustees includes theatre personnel, information managers and academics. In addition to our current seven Trustees we have ten Advisory Trustees, who we can approach for advice on issues of interest. They include former trustees whose expertise we are keen to retain and people working in archival repositories to ensure we maintain contact with such institutions.

What are your current holdings?

We do not have physical holdings of any kind. Our purposes include promoting the retention and care of theatre records, listing where material is held (whether that is in personal collections or repositories), commissioning oral histories of theatre practitioners, educating the industry about the care of theatre records and advising individuals holding theatre records or seeking information related to theatre history. Our database is a meta-database which includes more than 550 records of holdings by other individuals or institutions.

What services do you provide?

Our website provides advice to theatre practitioners holding material and links to related resources including our e-manual *Caring for your Theatre Archives*, purchasable on the Playmarket website. It also provides searchable access to our database of individuals and institutions holding theatre records and a link to the survey of theatre personnel we are currently running to enable us to identify and list individuals and companies. We also invite and answer queries from people seeking information about past productions, play scripts, theatre companies or personnel.

Can you tell us about a recent event, acquisition or change you'd like to highlight to ARANZ members?

One current project is to list the extensive theatre records held in the Special Collections at Auckland Libraries to enable them to be more discoverable. We'd be happy to hear from other repositories which have uncatalogued material of this kind. We are also applying for funding to add another six oral histories to the more than 20 we have commissioned previously. These are deposited in the Alexander Turnbull Library Oral History and Sound Collection, which has an extensive collection of oral histories of theatre personnel.

Tell us some of the challenges you face in your role or archive?

Our greatest challenge is to reach people - those holding material in boxes at home as well as new theatre groups and emerging practitioners. Our mission is to persuade them to ensure production and administrative records are retained and well cared for, and passed to suitable repositories in due course. We are at times asked to advise families sorting through the effects of frail or deceased former theatre practitioners and have

prevented material being destroyed in the past. To this end, we recently wrote to lawyers advising of our existence and mission. We also offer stickers to those who complete our survey to place on their records. The stickers read "Please do not destroy. Contents registered with Theatre Archives NZ". This is followed by our email address. Promoting the value of records is a worthy cause everyone in the sector can play a part in.

What do you enjoy most about the work you do?

Our greatest successes come when we save a collection from destruction, aid someone unsure what to do with their theatre records or have been able to put a researcher in touch with a source of information. Every record we add to our database helps. If we do not have a record that can aid the researcher, we can still assist them by referring them to the major repositories, as well as the Directory of Community Archives maintained by Archives New Zealand. The National Library's *Papers Past* is also a very useful resource for theatre researchers. We also undertake searches of the holdings of the National Library and the Alexander Turnbull for an enquirer. We find that many theatre researchers are unaware of these rich resources.

